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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

29 October 1957

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 50-57

INTERNAL O/NE USE ONLY

SUBJECT: Zhukov's Ouster

The following are EE staff's tentative views on what the Zhukov matter seems to involve:

1. Zhukov's ouster is intended as a demotion, not a promotion regardless of whether or not he is given a sinecure (as is apparently likely in light of Khrushchev's announcement):

a. Action was taken while he was away, announced as soon as he returned, and no suggestion of new post.

b. Any transfer from his old job, even if "upward" on paper, would in fact reduce his power.

c. Subsequent delay in publishing reasons for ouster, indicating a hitch.

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2. While Khrushchev was possibly in the same boat with Zhukov, more likely Khrushchev himself was the instigator. It is hard to jibe Khrushchev's growing consolidation of his own power (packing of Presidium and CC, etc.) with the idea he is the attacked, not the attacker. However, this is possible, especially if concern over his foreign and/or economic policy turns out to be the root cause.

3. Judging from the spate of editorials in Pravda, Red Star, Konsomolskaya Pravda, etc. on Army loyalty to the Party, recognition of Party's supreme role, need for more political education in Army, etc., the proximate cause campaign against Zhukov is his alleged "anti-party" resistance to supremacy of the Party.

4. But the real reason is undoubtedly deeper. We are inclined to the view (logical inference from 2 above) that Khrushchev saw in Zhukov's growing importance a potential military threat to his own position and took steps to nip it in the bud. He may have had real cause for immediate concern, or may have foresightedly desired to act before Zhukov grew too strong. But the undesirability of a row just before the 40th Anniversary argues against the latter point.

5. However, other reasons, such as foreign policy disagreements over the line to take in ME (and related Rokossovsky appointment) may have been partial or even main cause (Kennan plugs this).

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Those concerned over Khrushchev's "adventurism" may have seized on the opportunity to back a presumed voice of caution, i.e. Zhukov.

6. At any rate, the presumable long CC session, the failure to give a reason (almost a necessity in view of Zhukov's stature, his domestic popularity, and foreign speculation) indicates something went wrong. Khrushchev's belated announcement that Zhukov would get a post commensurate with his rank, etc., may also indicate some shift from earlier intentions.

a. Zhukov may have balked at what was planned for him and there ensued an argument over how his ouster is to be presented (in the light of his great popularity and desirability of placating the Army) or of what to do with a defeated Zhukov -- what new post to give him whether to oust him now from Party Presidium. But the duration of the CC session tends to argue against this.

b. It seems a shade more likely that Khrushchev's move led to serious repercussions. Perhaps Zhukov has rallied substantial military support and is challenging Khrushchev (however, there is no evidence of any military reaction as yet). This could have reactivated all the old divisions and venge-

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fulness; opposition sentiment still left around since June. Or concern over Khrushchev's policies (e.g. belligerence in ME) might cause a variety of strange lineups to emerge.

7. It is impossible to foretell the outcome at this point:

a. Khrushchev must have felt confident enough to take the initiative in removing so popular a figure. The odds are still that he is in control of the situation, though perhaps making some tactical retreat. He is on his own grounds; if an Army-Party issue is joined, few CC members will be immune to appeal to head off Bonapartism.

b. If Khrushchev emerges unscathed, having cut the military down to size, then he is clearly close to absolute power; and his action in seeking to remove the remaining major source of potential opposition to his total ascendancy is prima facie evidence that he has intended going in this direction, at any rate since the June purge.

c. If the outcome is inconclusive, resulting equilibrium will be highly unstable. Khrushchev may have been forced to beat more than a tactical retreat and opposition may have proved strong enough to call his own future into question, particularly if they got the military with them, or if the military itself were strong enough to force some modification in Khrushchev's original intentions.

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